

# POWER TO THE GREEN CONSUMER

September 10-18, has been declared Green Consumer Week. Most of us engage in everyday acts of violence against the environment - from our car exhaust fumes to the humble squirt of a deodorant. Pippa Hyam and Jan McHarry, of Friends of the Earth, argue for a consumerism that doesn't cost the earth.

Green Consumer Week aims to convince consumers of their power. Power to pressurize governments and multi-nationals to be more environmentally responsible; power to protect the environment by the way they live.

The possibilities for individual action are endless but the main aim is not to purchase products which are damaging to the environment or use excessive amounts of energy and resources in their manufacture. Products which come from threatened species or habitats, or use environmentally damaging chemicals, should be avoided.

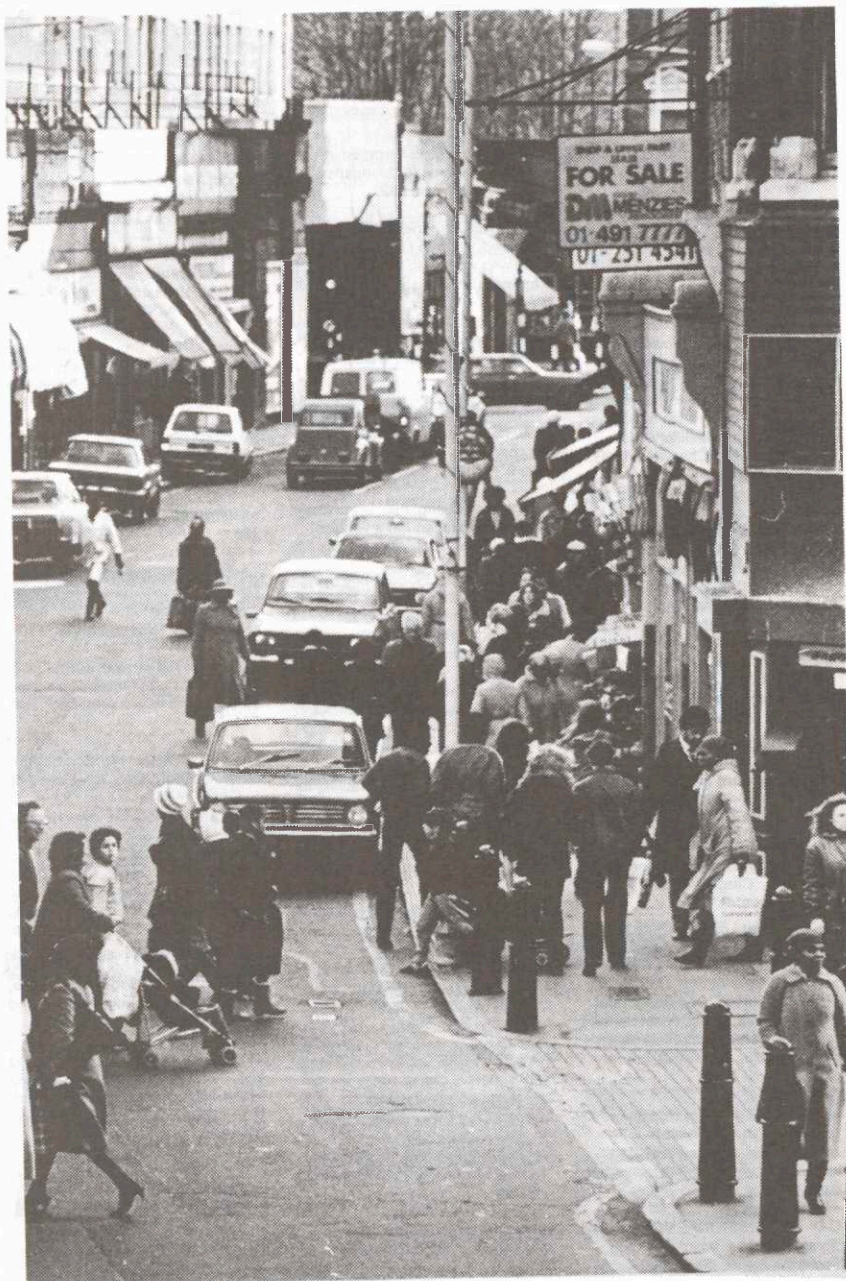
A range of different organizations have linked up to get the message across. 'Sustainability' will be producing a book called 'The Green Consumer Guide'. All branches of the Body Shop will be giving a High Street profile to posters on environmental consumer power. Brand New (Part of the Michael Peters marketing company) will be conducting a survey on 'The Green Consumer'. The Design Centre will host an exhibition on environmentally sound products, and Friends of the Earth will be using its national network of local groups to promote the week.

The week should give an added impetus to the movement for Green Consumerism.

In the late 1970's Friends of the Earth produced a list of manufacturers and retailers stocking whale products. The consumer boycott was so successful that by the time an EEC directive was passed banning trade in whale products, most were already off the market in this country.

It is important to let people know why you won't buy certain products. (Barclays Bank did not have to struggle to understand why they were losing customers and gaining pickets). Letters to supermarkets, manufacturers and retailers have all paid off in previous consumer actions — a testimony to the individuals who have gained a sense of personal responsibility towards safeguarding our environment and who have felt empowered to take action.

Of course the environmentally aware shopper knows how to spend as well as how to







PAM ISHERWOOD/Format

boycott — and spending power has been described as 'probably the most potent agent of social change an individual possesses'.

With the Green Consumer creating a demand, more and more companies are committed to protecting the environment, or have realised the marketing value of environmental awareness. The Body Shop, (Company of the Year 1987) adopted a 'non-exploitative approach' and turned out one of the eighties' success stories. Less sweet smelling, are the growing number of shops that use recycled paper or bio-degradable bags, have facilities for returnable bottles, sell products that are pesticide free or have been produced without cruelty to animals.

Companies *need* to court consumer loyalty. And in the industrialised nations the biggest consumers are women.

As the principal buyers of day-to-day household goods, women are the main target of advertising agencies. The slick campaigns may appear to shape the way we perceive a product and beyond that our society, but as soon as individuals find a flaw in the utopian world being sold, the vulnerability of the industry, the doubtful desirability of the product, becomes apparent.

The recent controversy surrounding the link between aerosols containing CFC's and the hole in the ozone layer, demonstrated how effective even the *threat* of concerted consumer action can be. Just 3 days before the launch of FOE's consumer boycott, 8 of the leading manufacturers (representing 65% of the UK toiletries market) announced that they planned to phase out CFC use by 1989. In June 1988, the British Aerosol Manufacturers Association bowed to further pressure and recommended that cans should be labelled to allow the consumer to select 'ozone-friendly' if they wished.

Each individual can choose to get involved, has the capacity to contribute to political and environmental change. The level of involvement can range from joining the peace camp at Greenham Common (where women have been prepared to change their whole way of life) to

choosing one product, or one bank, over another.

The lead has been given by women in the Third World — for years in the frontline against environmental destruction. The term 'eco-feminism' has been used to describe the potential of women in bringing about a more rational approach to how we use the Earth's resources. Women in Britain can take a stand against the exploiters, can put their money, — their power to *choose* where their conscience is.

Ultimately we are all responsible for our environment: to do nothing is to lend a helping hand to the devastation.

For further information about Green Consumer Week contact Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ. The Green Consumer Action Pack is available for £ 1.00

A new Womens Environment Network is being set up - For further information contact WEN, 287 City Rd, London EC1.



JOANNE O'BRIEN

Page	Title	Author	Rights
50	Power to the Green Consumer	McHarry, Jan; Hyam, Pippa	Usage Terms: The copyright status of Power to the Green Consumer is unknown. Please contact copyright@bl.uk with any information you have regarding this item.
50	high street		Usage Terms: The copyright status of high street is unknown. Please contact copyright@bl.uk with any information you have regarding this item.
51	Power to the Green Consumer	McHarry, Jan; Hyam, Pippa	Usage Terms: The copyright status of Power to the Green Consumer is unknown. Please contact copyright@bl.uk with any information you have regarding this item.
51	recycling	Isherwood, Pam	Usage Terms: © Pam Isherwood
51	high street	O'Brien, Joanne	This item has been redacted by request of the author